all confidence—was the minister afraid? In some sense he was afraid. That she accepted. But she hesitated to believe that he was afraid in the common sense that he was either lacking in nerve or overburdened with humanity; that he either feared fighting or would shrink from a salutary severity in repressing tumult. If he feared, he feared neither for his own skin nor for the skin of others; he feared for his policy or his ambition. These things were nothing to her: she was for the Prince, for his policy and his ambition. Were they the same as Stenovics's? Even a novice at the game could see that this by no means followed of necessity. The King was elderly and went a-fishing. The Prince was young and a martinet. In age Stenovics was between the two—some twenty years younger than the King, a dozen or so older than the Prince. Under the present régime he had matters almost entirely his own way. At first sight there was of a certainty no reason why his ambitions should coincide precisely with those of the Prince. Sixty-two, forty-one, twenty-eight—the ages of the three men in themselves illuminated the situation—that is, if forty-one could manage sixty-two, but had no such power over twenty-eight.

New to such meditations, yet with a native pleasure in them, taking to the troubled waters as though born a swimmer, Sophy thought and watched and looked about. As to her own part, she was clear. Whether Rastatz was right—whether that most vivid and indelible memory of hers was wrong—were questions which awaited the sole determination of the Prince of Slavna.

Her attitude would have been unchanged but her knowledge much increased, could she have been present at a certain meeting on the terrace of the Hotel de Paris that same evening. Markart was there, and little Rastatz, whose timely flight and accommodating memory rendered him to-day not only a free man, but a personage of value.

But neither did more than wait on the words of the third member of the party — that Colonel Stafnitz of the Hussars who had a long-time feud with Mistitch, for whom Mistitch had mistaken the Prince of Slavna. A most magnanimous, forgiving gentleman, apparently, this spare slim-built man with the thoughtful eyes; his whole concern was to get Mistitch out of the mess. The feud he seemed to remember not at all; it was a feud of convenience, a feud to swear to at the court-martial. He was as ready to accommodate Stenovics with the use of his name as Rastatz was to offer the requisite modifications of his memory. But there, with that supply of convenient fiction, his pliability stopped. He spoke to Markart, using him as a conduit-pipe — the words would flow through to General Stenovics.

"If the General doesn't want to see me now—and I can understand that he mustn't be caught confabbing with any supposed parties to the affair—you must make it plain to him how matters stand. Somehow, and by some means, our dear Hercules must be saved. Hercules is an ass; but so are most of the men and all the rowdies of Slavna. They love their Hercules, and they won't let him die without a fight—and a very big fight. In that fight, what might happen to His Royal Highness the Commandant? And if anything did happen to him, what might happen to General Stenovics? I don't know that either; but it seems to me that he'd be in an awkward place. The King wouldn't be pleased with him; and we here in Slavna, are we going to trouble ourselves about the man who couldn't save our Hercules?"

Round-faced Markart nodded perplexedly.

Stafnitz clapped him on the shoulder, with a laugh. "For Heaven's sake, don't think about it, or you'll get it all mixed! Just try to remember it. Your only business is to report what I say to the General."

Rastatz sniggered shrilly. When the wine was not in him, he was a cunning little rogue—a useful tool in any matter which did not ask for courage. "If I'd been here, Mistitch wouldn't have done the thing at all—or done it better. But what's done is done. And we expect the General to stand by us. If he won't, we must act for ourselves—and there'll be no bearing our dear Commandant if we sit down under the death of Mistitch. In short, the men won't stand it." He tapped Markart's arm. "The General must release unto us Barabas!"

The man's easy self-confidence, his air of authority, surprised neither of his companions. If there was a good soldier besides the Commandant in Slavna, Stafnitz was the man; if there was a head in Kravonia cooler than Stenovics's, it was on the shoulders of Stafnitz. He was the brain to Mistitch's body—the mind behind Captain Hercules's loud voice and brawny fist.

'Tell him not to play his big stake on a bad hand. Mind you tell him that."

"His big stake, Colonel?" asked Markart. 'What do I understand by that?"

"Nothing; and you weren't meant to. But tell Stenovics—he'll understand."

Rastatz laughed his rickety giggle again.

"Rastatz does that to make you think he understands better than you do. Be comforted—he doesn't." Rastatz's laugh broke out again, but now forced and uneasy. "And the girl who knocked Sterkoff out of time—I wish she'd killed the stupid brute—what about her, Markart?"

"She's—er—a very remarkable person, Colonel"

'Er—is she? I must make her acquaintance. Good-by, Markart."

Markart had meant to stay for half an hour, but he went

"Good-by, Rastatz."

Rastatz had just ordered another liqueur; but without waiting to drink it he too went.

Stafnitz sat on alone, smoking his cigar. There were no signs of care on his face. Though not gay, it was calm and smooth; no wrinkles witnessed to worry nor marred the comely remains of youth which had survived his five-and-thirty years.

He finished his cigar, drank his coffee, and rose to go. Then he looked carefully round the terrace, distinguished the prettiest woman with a momentarily lingering look, made his salute to a brother officer, and strolled away along the boulevard. Before he reached the barracks in St. Michael's Square he met a woman whose figure pleased him; she was tall and lithe, moving with a free grace. But over her face she wore a thick veil. The veil no doubt annoyed him; but he was to have other opportunities of seeing Sophy's face.

Stenovics Formally Surrenders the Order.

CHAPTER VI.

"Impossible" or "Immediate"

STENOVICS was indeed in a quandary. Mistitch had precipitated an unwelcome and premature crisis. The minister's deliberate, slow-moving game was brought to a sudden issue which he was not ready to face. It had been an essential feature, a governing rule, of his campaign to avoid any open conflict with the Prince of Slavna until an occasion arose on which both the army and the King would be on his side. The King was a power not merely by reason of his cheaply won popularity, but also because he was, while he lived, the only man who could crown Stenovics's operations with the consummation to which the minister and his ally, Countess Ellenburg, looked forward with distant yet sanguine hope. The army was with him now, but the other factor was lacking. The King's pride, as well as his affection, was enlisted in his son's interest. Moreover, this occasion was very bad. Mistitch was no better than an assassin; to take up arms on his behalf was to fight in a cause plainly disgraceful—one which would make success difficult and smirch it forever and beyond remedy, even if it came. It was no cause in which to fight both Prince and King.

Yet the alternative? Stafnitz had put that clearly. The army would have no more to do with the man who could not help it at the pinch, who could not save its favorite, who could not release Barabas.

The Prince seemed to be in his most unyielding mood—the Bourbon in him was peeping out. For the honor of the royal house, and for the sake of discipline, Mistitch must die. He had packed his court-martial with the few trustworthy friends he had among the officers, using the justification which jury-packers always use and sometimes have. He had no fear of the verdict and no heed for its unpopularity. He knew the danger—Stenovics made no secret about that—but said that he would sooner be beaten by a mutiny than yield to the threat of one. The first meant for him defeat, perhaps death, but not dishonor nor ignominy. The more Stenovics prophesied or threatened a revolt of the troops, the more the Commandant stiffened his neck.

Meanwhile Slavna waited in ominous, sullen quiet, and the atmosphere was so stormy that King Alexis had no heart for fishing.

On Friday morning, the day before that appointed for Mistitch's trial, the names of the members of the court were published. The list met with the reception which was no doubt anticipated even by the Prince himself. The streets began to fill with loiterers, talkers and watchers; barrack-rooms were vociferous with grumbling and with speculation. Stafnitz, with Rastatz always at his heels, was busy with many interviews; Stenovics sat in his room, moodily staring before him, seeking a road out of his blind alley; and a carriage drew up before the sign of the Silver Cock as the cathedral bells chimed noon. It was empty inside, but by the driver sat Peter Vassip, the Prince's personal attendant, wearing the sheepskin coat, leather breeches, and high boots that the men of the hills wore. His business was to summon Sophy to Suleiman's Tower.

The Square of Saint Michael was full of life and bustle; the Golden Lion did a fine trade. But the center of interest was on the north wall and the adjacent quays under the shadow of Suleiman's Tower. Within those walls were the two protagonists. Thence the Prince issued his orders; thither Mistitch had been secretly conveyed the night before by a party of the Prince's own guard, trustworthy Volsenians. A crowd of citizens and soldiers were chattering and staring at the tower when Sophy's carriage drew up at the entrance of the bridge which, crossing the North River, gave access to the fort.

The mouth of the bridge was guarded by fifty of those same Volsenians. They had only to retreat and raise the bridge behind them, and Mistitch was safe in the trap. Only—and the crowd was quick enough to understand the situation—the prisoner's trap could be made a snare for his jailer too. Unless provisions could be obtained from the country round, it would be impossible to hold the tower for long against an enemy controlling the butchers' and bakers' shops of Slavna. Yet it could be held long enough to settle the business of Captain Hercules.

The shadow of the weeping woman had passed from Sophy's spirit; the sad impression was never the lasting one with her. An hour of crisis always found her gay. She entered the time-worn walls of Suleiman's Tower with a thrill of pleasure, and followed Peter Vassip up the narrow stair with a delighted curiosity. The Prince received her in the large round room which constituted the first floor of the central tower. Its furniture was simple, almost rude, its massive walls entirely bare, save for some pieces of ancient armor. Narrow slits, deep-set in the masonry, served for windows and gave a view of the city and of the country on every side—they showed the seething throng on the north wall and on the quays; the distant sound of a thousand voices struck the ear.

Zerkovitch and his wife were with the Prince, seated over a simple meal, at which Sophy joined them. Marie had watched Sophy's entrance and the Prince's greeting closely; she marked Sophy's excitement betrayed in the familiar signal on her cheek. She stood in certain awe of this beautiful girl, and feared, without knowing why, that in Sophy's hands lay the fate of all of them. But the journalist was too excited on his own account to notice other people. He was talking feverishly, throwing his lean body about and dashing his hands up and down; he hardly paused to welcome the newcomer. He had a thousand plans by which the Prince was to overcome and hold down Slavna. One and all, they had the same defect; they supposed the absence of the danger which they were contrived to meet. They assumed that the soldiers would obey

Continued on page 16